

**Level 1 Adopted by the Information Services Policy Board
June 19, 2003**

State of Maine Web Standards

Introduction and Purpose

The Internet should be used to facilitate cost-effective and efficient business. This means that the Internet should be seen as a tool, a catalyst for streamlining agency business practices, completing transactions without paper, reducing the number of forms and incoming calls, answering commonly asked questions, etc. In accordance with acceptable practice, agencies should seek to link with other Internet sites such as State agencies and local governments to best serve their customers.

Maine State's presence on the Internet must be professional, comprehensive and coordinated. While the Office of the CIO and the InforME Governing Board will provide general coordination, the ultimate stewardship of Maine's presence on the Internet rests with individual State agencies. It is each State agency's responsibility to contribute to a professional, appropriate and coordinated presence for State of Maine on the Internet. Toward this end, each State Agency's home page will be linked to the State of Maine home page. Also, home pages need to be formatted to present information clearly, in a way most useful to those who frequent our websites.

The purpose of the State of Maine Web Standards is to:

- Reinforce Maine.gov identity and make it clear to users they are on a state site
- Provide continuity in website appearance
- Improve usability and accessibility
- Ensure that critical state links appear on all agency sites
- Integrate agency sites and the portal, to support the “one government” approach and move away from bureaucratic separation of information

Scope

These standards apply to all agencies with the Executive Branch of Maine State Government.

Requirements

Level One – Compliance Required for Executive Branch – xx/03

- **State Accessibility Policy Compliance**

Web Accessibility Policy of the State of Maine

Last Revised: March 22, 2001

Adopted by the Information Services Policy Board July 19, 2001

<http://www.state.me.us/cio/accessibility/webpolicy.html>

Policy

It shall be the policy of the State of Maine that information and services on Maine State Government web sites is designed to be accessible to people with disabilities.

- **Server-side Maine.gov header**

The header will be a small sliver to appear across the top of all Executive Branch agency pages. The header will be applied server-side by InforME to applicable sites on the state server.

Sliver Design specifications:

- The Maine.gov logo will appear in the top left and will link to the Maine.gov home page.
- Other links in the header will be “State Agencies” (link to agency website index), “Web Policies” (link to a page listing the policies), “MyMaine.gov” (link to customized portal home page), and a Statewide Search box.
- DHTML hover menus will be applied to some of these links (a menu will appear when user hovers mouse over the link) to provide additional links under each one. This will allow for more links to be available in the header without it becoming cluttered or large. For example, under “Web Policies”, the menu will include Accessibility, Privacy, and Security. Users of screen reader software or browsers without java script will not see the hover menus but will be able to use the regular links in the header to access the same information.
- The MyMaine.gov link will integrate the customizable portal across agency sites and provide a helpful service for users. Clicking on the MyMaine.gov link will bring users to the customized portal home page. However, hovering over the link will show an additional menu with options for “Add page to my links”, “Watch this page” (will notify when page updated), and “Create a reminder”.

Level One – (cont.)

• **Web Design and Administration Standards Compliance**

Web Design Standards

- Contact Information: Each agency's website will have either: a) a "Contact Us" page easily accessed from the home page, or b) a contact information area on the home page. Contact information should include: Mailing address, fax number, phone number, toll free number and TTY number if available, and an email address or web response form.
- Online Services: Each agency, when applicable, will have a page or area called "Online Services" that includes links to any e-government or interactive applications in which users can accomplish a transaction online with the agency.
- Agency Information: Each agency will have an "About Us" or "About [Agency]" page or section that describes the functions of the agency and may include but is not limited to: the agency's mission, vision, or purpose; organizational structure; staff; news releases; location; job opportunities.
- Naming Conventions: Common content in agency websites should be referred to consistently in site navigation. The following are examples of terms approved for use: "Site Map" refers to a text-based list of links to a site's pages (top 2-3 levels), organized according to the site navigation structure. "Frequently Asked Questions" or "FAQ" refers to a compilation of the most common questions received by the agency, along with their answers. "How Do I...?" is similar to FAQ and refers to a compilation of instructions or resources related to common tasks. "Home" refers to the first or front page that a user sees when visiting a site (usually named index.html or default.html). Additional naming conventions may be defined in the Maine.gov Style Guide.
- Meta-tags: Each agency will include standard keyword and description meta-tags in the HTML code of the home page and key sub-pages.
- Page Titles: Each agency will use descriptive page titles for each web page.
- Page Width: Agency web pages must be viewable without horizontal scrolling on an 800 X 600-pixel screen display.
- Browser Compatibility: At a minimum, web site design must be compatible with current versions of Internet Explorer and Netscape, for both Windows and Mac platforms.

Website Administration Requirements

- Portal Updates: Agencies should notify the Maine.gov portal when new services or sites are added, and when site structure is changed so that existing links to the site might be affected.
- Content Maintenance: Agencies should have a formal process in place for content posting, review, and approval by appropriate agency management.
- Backups: Agencies must maintain current backups of their web pages.

Level Two – Best Practices, strongly recommended but not required at this time

Design Goals and Principles

- **Keep it Simple**
Fancy and flashy is often more confusing than it is impressive. Users will appreciate being able to get around your site quickly and find the information they need. Simple sites also download faster. Reduce clutter and remove unnecessary visual elements.
- **Be Consistent & Build on Convention**
Build on users' expectations based on Web and real-world conventions and be consistent across your site in use of layout, terminology, imagery, and navigation.
- **Encourage Exploration**
Support your users as they explore your site, by giving users predictable results to their actions, and allowing them to recover from errors. If a user selects the wrong navigation button, make it easy for them to locate the correct path without using the "Back" button. Provide multiple paths to information.
- **Help Users Find Their Way**
Provide tips, contextual help, "see also" links, descriptive link labels, reminders, and visual cues. Indicate to the user where they are within your site or application, and what they can do next.
- **Design for the Users**
Find out who your audience is and what their needs and goals are, and address them in your site structure, navigation, and design.
- **Design for a Broad Range of Users**
Ensure that your site is accessible to users with disabilities, various browsers and devices.

Overall Design Recommendations

- Place logo/branding in upper left or upper center, consistent on all pages. On interior pages, logo should also function as a link to the homepage.
- Download time should be as fast as possible, less than 10 seconds at most common connection speeds is ideal (but difficult to achieve). This means a file size of less than 30K. Maximum file size should be 50K.
- Design must be compatible with current common browsers, on both Windows and Mac platforms. Some features and design elements may not work in older browsers, but the pages should be usable, functional, and "degrade gracefully".

- Use an external site-wide stylesheet (CSS) to control font family, size, color, headlines, subheads, link styles, and hover effects. At this time, do not use CSS to control page layout.
- Page Width: Use “liquid design” rather than fixed width so that the page size adjusts to different screen resolutions. Optimize for 770 pixels wide, but the design should work well for 620 – 1024 pixels.
- Do not use frames.

Level Two – (cont.)

- Be cautious with background graphics that will have text over them. Make sure that text has good contrast to the background for easy readability.
- The most critical page elements should be visible without scrolling down the page (“above the fold”). Avoid long scrolling pages of more than 2-3 screens – break up content into multiple shorter pages when possible.
- Avoid use of splash pages with no content – take users directly to a content driven home page.
- Use HTML horizontal lines sparingly.
- Recommended page background color: white or light solid color
- Recommended text color for body text: black (or dark color)
- Recommended type style: a sans-serif standard font such as Arial or Verdana.
- Use colors and imagery appropriate for the purpose and desired tone of the site.
- Select and use a consistent color scheme throughout the site (usually 3 or fewer main colors).

Graphics Recommendations

- Use logos and icons sparingly. Icons on a page should be consistent in look and feel and not compete with one another for attention.
- Use appropriate image format for the web and the type of graphic. For example, JPG is usually a better format for photographs and graphics with subtle gradations of color. GIF is usually a better format for graphics with areas of solid color, such as line drawings and illustrations.
- Optimize graphics to the smallest size possible without detriment to clarity. Web image resolution should be reduced to 72 dpi.

- Do not resize graphics using a web editor. Always format the graphic to the necessary size using a graphics editor prior to compression and optimization for the web.
- Do not make changes to a JPG file that previously has been compressed. Always save the original, uncompressed image file so that you can go back and make changes if necessary.

Scripting and Multimedia Recommendations

- Do not use continuously scrolling text, marquees, blinking text, or constantly running animations.
- JavaScript – Avoid using for important functionality. Pages must be functional and usable when JavaScript is turned off. Do not use JavaScript to open new windows. JavaScript/DHTML may be used for dynamic menu effects as long as the user is able to use the site effectively when scripting is disabled.

Level Two – (cont.)

Content and Navigation Recommendations

- Clearly indicate the purpose of the site, application, and/or the agency it represents.
- Use labels for navigation that are easily understood by the user, not based on internal jargon or organizational terminology.
- Limit primary navigation to no more than 5-8 items. You may want to include other options in a separate navigation menu, in the home page body text, or in the page footer.
- Avoid use of “click here” in links – use more descriptive link text that makes sense when read out of context.
- Provide a way to indicate to users where they are in your site on all pages. “Breadcrumb” navigation is recommended.
- Include a text-based site map, labeled “Site Map” (not necessary for very small or simple sites).
- Use page footers for information such as copyright and date of last modification. Recommended footer format is plain HTML text rather than graphics.
- Indicate to the user what information is new or changing.
- Include a link to the Home page on each page of the site (except the home page).

Text and Style Recommendations

- Spell out abbreviations and acronyms the first time they are used, followed by the abbreviation.
- Use exclamation marks sparingly.
- Avoid all caps (except for careful use in navigation elements).
- Underline links in body text and make them a different color from regular body text (not necessary in navigation bars).
- Don't use underlining in regular body text; it may be confused with a link.

Level Two – (cont.)

- If a link is anything other than a regular web page or email link, indicate what will happen (for example, links to PDF or Word documents, links that launch a script or multimedia). Indicate any special software needed and the size of the document if applicable.
- Use left-justified text as a general rule.
- Break up paragraphs into easily digested “chunks”. Provide informative headings and sub-headings within text to help users scan. Use bulleted or numbered lists where appropriate to allow visual scanning.
- Limit page length to two or three screens at most. Break up longer documents into multiple web pages with clear navigation within the document.
- When converting paper documents for the web, reduce word count and re-format to promote visual scanning by the reader.
- Adopt a consistent writing style throughout the site. For example, select one writing reference guide that all writers will use.

Level Three – Supporting Resources

Additional resources may be available to any state or local Maine State Government agency free of charge. Contact InforME (621-2600) for further information on free sources, as well as contracted web services they can provide.

- Maine.gov layout suggestions
- Maine.gov approved graphics and design elements
- Maine.gov style sheet
- Maine.gov color palette
- Maine.gov style guide